

# Determining Objectives

**Step  
2**

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## What is it?

Objectives are the goals the Planning Committee is working towards or intending to accomplish. Objectives are also known as "Desired Future Conditions" in the NRCS-National Planning Procedures Handbook. They are the Planning Committee's expression of the desired future state of the resources compared to existing conditions. Objectives can be quantitative (expressed in numbers) or qualitative (expressed in words). For quantitative objectives, target values can be set depending on the availability of data.

## When do we do it?

The Planning Committee determines their objectives after they have identified the resource concerns in the planning area. Determining objectives usually takes place around the third or fourth Planning Committee meeting.

## Why is it important?

The Planning Committee needs to reach consensus about their objectives, and capture the objectives in writing. Reaching consensus and documenting the results is important for several reasons. Discussing objectives among Planning Committee members provides an opportunity for the committee to work out their differences early in the planning process. Without clearly stated objectives that all support, the Planning Committee will later find it difficult to select and endorse solutions to the resource problems. Further, the objectives are critical information for the Technical Advisory Committee. The Technical Advisory Committee uses the objectives to understand what the Planning Committee wants to accomplish, and they identify solutions to the resource problems that can meet these objectives.

## How do we do it?

### Brainstorming "Ground Rules"

- Everyone participates
- No evaluating ideas
- Think BIG
- Leave rank at the door
- Be brief
- Be specific

A facilitator is used to solicit and record the objectives of the group. The facilitator sets the tone and the atmosphere of the meeting by helping participants feel comfortable with each other and encouraging participation. As always, the facilitator is a neutral party. When objectives are being developed, it is particularly important that the facilitator not be perceived as having any personal preferences as to what should happen in the planning area. For this reason, a Planning Committee member should never facilitate the discussion about objectives, and occasionally local field staff should refrain from facilitating. Instead, try using a trained facilitator from outside the planning area.

For each resource concern, have the facilitator lead the Planning Committee through the following questions. All three questions should be answered for each resource concern.

**1. What desired future conditions do we want to achieve with respect to the resource problem?** (Other ways to prompt discussion include: What do we want to happen with this resource problem? In what condition do we want the resource to be? Develop a goal statement for each resource problem.)

**2. What do we know about this problem?** (Ask the committee to describe the

problem: What is happening? Where is it occurring? Why is it occurring? How long has it been happening? Has the intensity of the problem changed? What sources of information are available about the problem?)

**3. What do we need to know about this problem?** (Ask the committee: What questions do we have about this problem that need to be answered in order to solve it? What questions need to be answered in order to implement our solutions?)

Initial discussions typically require objectives be stated in qualitative, or narrative terms. After the technical advisors complete the inventories and devise management strategies, the objectives can be quantified with target values based on the benchmark conditions.

It may take several meetings to record the Planning Committee's objectives, comments and questions for all the resource concerns. The results of these discussions should be typed and distributed to all members for their review. Changes can be made immediately if necessary, or additional changes might be made later in light of findings by the Technical Advisory Committee.

If necessary, the Planning Committee can prioritize their objectives. Consider prioritizing objectives if they identify more than a few objectives for each resource concern. To prioritize objectives, use the same ranking technique explained in the RPG factsheet, "Identifying Resource Concerns."

### Why ask "What do we know?" and "What do we need to know?"

The purpose of questions #2 and #3 is to document the exiting knowledge among committee members about the resource problems, and identify areas they feel need to be further investigated. Information about "what is known" and "what needs to be known" can help the Technical Advisory Committee target their inventory work.

Stakeholders also tend to raise issues during the discussion that can potentially sidetrack their progress towards reaching consensus about objectives. For example, during the discussion someone may ask why the problem is occurring. Or another person may counter someone's opinion by citing a lack of information about some aspect of the problem. Recording these comments with Questions # 2 and #3 validates their concerns while avoiding having to answer the questions at this time. It is important to remember that technical questions about why or where problems are occurring or how the problems should be solved are left to the technical advisors as the planning project unfolds.

The facilitator's challenge is to keep this discussion focused on what the Planning Committee wants to achieve, while minimizing conversation about related issues. There will be time later to discuss these issues. Help the Planning Committee understand that their why, how and what questions are being recorded and the Planning Committee's goals documented so that the Technical Advisory Committee can provide answers for the committee's consideration.

In practice, people share their thoughts without necessarily connecting them to one of the three questions. That is, the facilitator may encourage the group to identify their objectives for a water quality problem, when someone calls out, "But how do we know the regulatory standard is fair?". The facilitator should acknowledge the comment, record it under the question, "What do we need to know?" and then continue soliciting comments. Because this is the way this exercise tends to proceed, it's helpful to use three flip charts, each headed by one of the questions. This allows the facilitator to record comments under the appropriate topic as they are offered.

#### Key Points

- Initially, most objectives will be stated qualitatively. Later, inventory work can help the Committee quantify their goals.
- Let the Committee set initial objectives (what, where, how much) for each problem.
- Encourage the committee to establish priority objectives.
- Help the committee begin thinking about who can provide technical expertise for each resource concern.

## The Next Step

After objectives are identified, it's time to organize the Technical Advisory Committee using the list of resource concerns and objectives. Also, help the Planning Committee develop a mission statement for their committee. Refer to the factsheets on "Setting Up the Technical Advisory Committee" and "Developing a Mission Statement."